



Stuff They Didn't Teach Me In Sunday School



Episode 140 - He Was There in the Wilderness (John 7-8)

The setting for this episode of "Sunday School" is the Feast of Tabernacles, an annual commemoration of the 40 years Israel wandered through the wilderness of Sinai after leaving Egypt. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus touches on many themes from that period of wandering. Last week He called Himself the "Bread of Life." The crowds thought of the manna God provided each day for Israel as they wandered through the wilderness. Today Jesus picks up on two more wilderness themes—water and light.

Rivers of Living Water

During the 40 years of Israel's wandering they found natural water was scarce. Growing crops to feed the nation was out of the question, and it would be difficult to sustain their herds of livestock. Clearly, God would have to step in if the entire nation was to survive 40 years. We see one such occasion in Exodus 17:1-6. When the thirsty Israelites grumbled, God told Moses to strike a rock with his rod, and water came gushing out. Now in this Feast of the Tabernacles, Jesus reminds the crowds of this event when He says, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink."

- What experiences have you had with droughts, dry spells or the rationing of water?
- How do these help you better understand Jesus' words of promise?

Jesus wanted the Jews to make a connection in their minds—a connection Paul would later make in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, "For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."

- What comfort does it give you to know that Jesus is the spiritual Rock that follows you wherever you find yourself?

Jesus promised to turn the hearts of all believers into spiritual rocks as well, pouring out rivers of living water to all those around. As John explains, He was speaking about the Holy Spirit who works through us to bring the comforting Good News of Jesus Christ to all those around us.

- Describe a time when you were refreshed by the words or actions of a fellow believer.

Light of the World

Along with water, light was an important part of the Feast of Tabernacles. It reminded the Jews of the pillar that accompanied Israel through its years of wilderness wandering. "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night" (Exodus 13:21). When the Egyptian army came out to recapture the Israelites we read, "And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians'" (Exodus 14:24-25). Jesus wanted the Jews to look at Him in the temple courts, and see by faith the One who had accompanied Israel in the pillar of cloud and fire, delivering them from their enemies and guiding them to the Promised Land.

- When Jesus says, "Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" how is He taking the crowds back to the wilderness wandering?
- What does that promise mean to you today?
- What great comfort does it bring to realize this same Jesus is with us until the end of the age, just as He was with Israel constantly during the wilderness years?

- What point is Jesus making when He does not simply say, "I am the Light of Israel," but "I am the Light of the world"?

Savior, not Condemner

In an attempt to trap Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes drag a woman before Him whom they had caught in adultery.

- When you think of adultery, homosexuality, and other such sins, do you find your initial reaction is more like the Pharisees and scribes or more like Jesus?

Compare Jesus' reaction here with His words to another prominent Pharisee named Nicodemus back in John 3:17, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."

- How can Jesus' reaction to sin give us insight when confronting sin?
- If you had a friend caught in a sin, how could you show them the danger of continuing in their sin, while still being as gracious and gentle as Jesus was with the woman?
- As our society gradually accepts more things the Bible clearly identifies as sinful, how can we speak up for God's truth, without coming off too intolerant and losing our influence?